

# Supervisor/HR Supplement Newsletter

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*Helpful Resources From Your Employee Assistance Program*

## Change without Resistance



The focus of problem solving is usually on the 'gap' and the present problem/s and rarely is enough emphasis placed upon creating shared clarity about the destination.

The emphasis on deficiencies tends to have a disempowering effect – “I can see that’s the problem but I’m not sure I can change.” This in turn creates defensiveness – “Why should I change?” because it becomes easier to knock down the change than to admit we can’t. In turn, this defensiveness and reluctance, coupled with a human dislike of being confronted with our shortcomings, fractures the relationships and depletes the trust necessary for people to make changes.

### **A Different Starting Point**

Every person or organization has inherent creativity, capability, imagination and success. If we begin from this perspective then a new approach to change is possible.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to change that begins with the assumption that, for whatever the issue, there will always be examples for an individual or organization of success. They may be fleeting or infrequent or incomplete but they will always exist.

Too often these successes are dismissed as being a distraction to the problem or too insignificant to matter. But, surely, it is worth finding out how these successes occurred – not because we want to revel in the knowledge that everything is OK but because if we really understood how these occurrences came about we might be much better equipped to create more of them.

### **The Appreciative Inquiry Way**

Appreciative Inquiry begins by asking exactly these questions. It also begins, critically, by asking them of the individuals who will ultimately be asked to change.

AI begins with establishing the change which is aspired. What does the individual or organization want more of? This then becomes the focus of research, and questions are developed to look deeply into where such behavior or outcomes already exist. These questions are positively framed and individuals involved in the change are interviewed to explore the best examples of the chosen aspiration. The emphasis is on real stories and actual events as these are not only primary data but they tend also to be easier to collect and communicate.

The stories are then shared and discussed to establish what they all have in common. It is also useful to examine where they differ as this can uncover alternative and complementary strategies to success. The conclusions are then drawn together into a compelling and memorable vision of what success would look like and feel like.

The next stage is to create a set of statements for what will be necessary to create the desired future. These will be based in the vision but will be both provocative and practical and will provide guidance for action planning – both now and ongoing.

Using the vision and guidelines, action steps are created for who will do what and when – both immediately and into the future.

Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available to you and your dependents. If you are struggling with children, finances, or just want some practical advice on health or the mind-body connection, contact Deer Oaks at:

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## *Continued: Change without Resistance*

### **Why Does It Work?**

Most people, when they hear this approach, say that it sounds very logical but struggle to see why it is so much more effective.

AI is based on a vast body of research into human behavior in the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology and other social sciences. It also shares its scientific underpinnings with other leading edge approaches to change like Neuro Linguistic Programming and Coaching. There are many reasons, therefore, why AI works but without going too deeply into the theory, some of the key ones are:

*We get more of what we focus on.* If we ask questions about our problems the issues will take up more of our attention and become more significant. If we inquire deeply and persistently into what we want we will find, inevitably, that we create the future that we are learning about.

*Successful change needs to engage with what really matters to each individual.* The interviews connect each individual with what really matters to them and thus help create a personally compelling reason to change.

*Change is a social phenomenon.* Relationships, support and co-operation are required for almost any change. AI fosters and grows these by creating energizing, positive and transformative interactions between those involved. Human beings move towards positive images of the future and the creation of a compelling, sensory rich picture of the destination is vital.

*Change takes courage.* People have more energy and confidence moving into the future (unknown) when they take forward parts of the present (known).

*Change requires action.* Positive practical steps, by as many people as possible, are essential to make progress and achieve results.



### **How Could You Use It?**

AI can be applied from 1:1 coaching interactions to organizational change involving thousands of people. It can help individual change, the creation of powerful teams, in conflict resolution, cultural change, mergers, and redundancies – any form of change in fact. It can transform workshop or training design for a short session of a few hours to much longer-term projects.



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## *Ask Your EAP!*

**The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.**

- Q.** Is being “approachable” important for a supervisor? I keep an open-door policy. Doesn’t this mean I am approachable?
- A.** Approachability is a valuable strength for a manager and usually means he or she is an effective communicator. Being approachable increases the likelihood of reducing risk to the organization and solving problems and concerns before they grow worse. Approachability is closely associated with two other skills – vulnerability (openness) and authenticity. Employees are naturally attracted to these personality traits, and they directly influence your reputation, likeability, and the appearance that you are approachable. Typically these traits are also associated with warmth and patience and the willingness to respect employees’ views, collaborate with them, and be a good listener. Do you struggle with any of these traits or skills? If so, there may be room to become more approachable. Your EAP can help because these skills can be taught or the traits can be acquired.
- Q.** I am a new supervisor. What myths and misconceptions about being a supervisor am I most likely to accidentally model and therefore get myself in trouble with my employees and management?
- A.** It is good to have an awareness of the stereotypes, misperceptions, and falsehoods associated with the supervisors’ role to avoid modeling them. Most fall into four broad areas. 1) The Dominating Personality (bossing people around, intimidating staff, instilling fear, and being loud); 2) The Overseer (being the sole planner, doing all the big thinking, delegating everything, and kicking back to watch it all happen); 3) The Easy Streeter (giving lots of kudos, keeping the troops happy, being a friend to all, and trusting that the skills of supervision will come naturally and you will now have less stress with no more hard work); and 4) The Stress Monster (always being available day or night, being a know-all-see-all, doing the most difficult tasks, being smarter than anyone you supervise, never making a mistake, and arriving early and staying late).
- Q.** I am experiencing ongoing stress. Recently I have felt a little detached from conversations and events. It is difficult to describe, but sometimes it’s like I am only “half there”, not really involved. It also feels like I am just going through the motions. Is this burnout?
- A.** A professional assessment is recommended to determine the cause of this symptom. Many people under stress and experiencing burnout complain of feeling “detached” from their surroundings. Things seem less real, even a little dream-like. This is known as depersonalization. It is a defense mechanism, but it is less commonly experienced as compared to others like denial, externalizing, and projection. Its purpose is to taper your response to stress in your environment, but this is not the way you should continue to function. You need to be aware of your surroundings, especially when driving a car or operating machinery. You know something is not quite right, so with that information, turn to the EAP for an assessment. The EAP can help you determine if you are experiencing burnout, evaluate you for other symptoms, and get you to the right help.

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